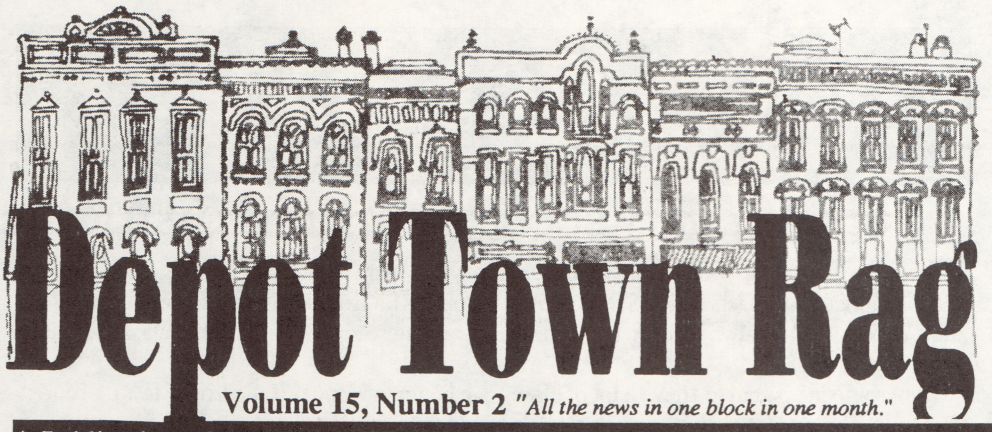

Depot Town Rag

Volume 15, Number 2 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

100% FREE Rag content

February 1992

- **Winter Blues & Jazz**
- **Used food / no food**
- *Lots of class*
- They just don't get it
- **Goals & Stategies**

and other strictly local stuff. . . .

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

It's our most popular theme:

Going all out for business

[Who can remember the above slogan which appeared on the windows of Millard Fillmore's Antiques at 50 East Cross in 1977?]

Recent changes on the block have set regulars to buzzing about what's needed next down in one of Michigan's oldest commercial district.

- A railroadiana shop with model trains, train patches, engineer's hats, enamel signs of rail logos, posters, train memorabilia, both old and new.
- A coffee shop with espresso, laté, coffee pots and exotic coffees 'to go.'
- A full-line bakery
- Neon antiques
- Antiques related to the automobile industry: chrome parts, license plates, calendars, posters, books and kits
- A good used sporting goods shop that recycles balls, bats, uniforms, shoes, and the various paraphernalia left over after the kids are gone but the stuff's still good

The ethic of "Wouldn't it be a fun hobby to run a cute little shop down in the Historic District!" has passed. Most of those people are living at 'the home' still tieing macramé weed pots together now. Today's businesses contribute to the life of the neighborhood as well as to the life of the owner and employees. Depot Town's third- and fourth-generation businesses have led the way and those darling little boutiques out at the strip mall have only confused the issue. This block makes it on cars and food, antiques and friendliness; just about everything else is extra. If the extras can fit in to all this puritan practicality, they're welcome to stay.

A current listing of properties is on file with the DTA clearing house. Call 482-6371 for up-to-date information on creative opportunities in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town.

Maybe we were right all along?!

Depot Town: Where the Car Wars were won!

When President Bush returned from his recent trip to Japan, Americans wondered if Detroit's automakers could survive. Some said the President should have gone to Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town, instead. Cars have always been a big item down here and Detroit's cars are the neighborhood's favorites. Cars have always meant "jobs, jobs, jobs" down in Depot Town.

Just last week an Ypsilanti Police cruiser parked in the alley momentarily (Not to worry. No parking tickets were given. Nobody believes the posted parking warnings any more. The officers were probably after an ice cream cone!) and most old hands on the block felt the new cruiser looked perfectly at home here. Made right across town at Willow Run, this shiny new white behemoth looked like a Ford Taurus on steroids — belying the fact that it was a General Motors product through and through.

This year's four-wheeled friends from Detroit's auto shops harken back the good old days of the Fifties with bulbous sheetmetal work suggesting a vehicle that was parked outdoors overnight in a heavy snow storm. Some called it a design flaw but Detroit kids knew better. Maybe — just maybe — another model change will see the return of reflectorized fins and an extra dollop of chrome and plastic that almost looks like chrome.

Some of yesterday's auto beauties still grace the district, however. It's not unusual to see a forty-year-old Cadillac floating toward Campus like a pair of salmon swimming upstream to spawn. Family dogs ride on the back boot of an old convertible and sniff the air just as they did when the driver was a kid. Same driver, same kind of car. New dog. But the dogs understand the joy of riding around town and smiling at everyone even if some of the people don't.

Every time a car restoratiion club stops off for a weekend in the block the parking lots begin to resemble fresh loaves of Wonder Bread sitting on a store shelf. Only their frosting-like colors give them away as the much-pampered treasures of afficianadoes who can remember a different time in history: a time when craftsmanship and cleanliness, V-8s and voluptuousness were respected hallmarks and die-cast chrome slogans made them feel sexy and needed and 'modern.'

City Body's Scott Sobbry has said, "This is a community that loves cars!" and he's absolutely right. Just as we still revere beehive hair-dos, saddle shoes, shackled jeans, ducktails and doo-wops, we like our cars to be big, colorful, shiny, and maybe even a little glitzy.

Ypsilanti's bulging movable living rooms might just have a message for the Big Three automakers: We liked them then and we like them now. We liked driving them and we liked building them. And, if no one wants to continue that tradition with new models rolling off the line, then they can always come down to the old railroad district on a nice day and see the lovingly restored and carefully kept models of another age. We collect everything.

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CLASS ACTS

Lots of *class* seen in this old district

Seems that everybody wants to be 'classy,' but they don't say which kind of class. Any observer of the American Neo-Depression Scene knows that ours is far from a classless society. *First Class* and *Class 'A'* don't always mean the same thing, and there are plenty of other classes of class in between.

When someone is said to "have a lot of class," we begin to wonder if it's Low Class or Tourist Class. Just being *classy* isn't enough. You've got to differentiate.

Take the classism inherent in used clothing, for instance. Since we were kids in school, we just hated it when someone would intend to compliment us on a 'new outfit.' Wearing something that was recognized as 'new' was — and is — the ultimate embarrassment. "Oh, this old thing?" we simper, not wanting anyone to think that we're trying to 'put on the dog' or that we 'primped' for this occasion. We're just *natural*, that's all. This is just the 'real me!'

As we shop for used or 'nearly new' clothing, it is important to remember the many subdivisons of *class*:

High Class: Someone else bought this to make an impression. If it's for sale again, why not affix a note as to whether it worked or not the first time? "Wore this to The Club for New Year's. Boss's wife was green with envy!" Or, "Big night at Chez Alfonse. Don't sit in the Heritage Room; it's the same as the slip covers."

First Class: Usually has to do with travel and its pack-ability. First class clothes won't wrinkle, won't show Mai Tai stains and are probably still on somebody else's charge account waiting to be paid for the first time. The cruise is over and so is its wearability.

Cabin Class: Early clothing of this variety mostly encompassed babushkas and brogans, but they're back in vogue now. Northern Michigan folk think this wardrobe is made up of hunting togs. We don't recommend them. We had one of those camoflauge jackets hanging in the closet and now we can't find it.

Executive Class: There are many accessories to this unique line. Primary among them is the attaché case that opens to become a bar with chrome decanters and glasses and red ties that look like nosebleeds and usually complemented by women's scarves draped over one shoulder and held in place with a gold circle pin. These are sometimes blended with the Cabin Class babushkas.

Tourist Class: Bermuda shorts, Hawaiian print shirts, grass skirts, camera bags, mu mus, A-line dresses, 'walking' shoes and straw hats with little green windows built into the visor; that's what our vacation wardrobes were made of. Trade sloganed shirts with friends and you'll be taken for a world traveller without the passport woes. Watch for those great woven straw purses with sea shells glued to the side. They're great for storing all the other Tourist Class wardrobe in — and they float!

Class A: Be careful of this designation. Grade A, Prime, Choice and others come to mind. Unless you're dressing for the 'meat market,' you might want to think about wearing a butcher's apron.

Remedial Class: Most high schoolers dress in this style today. It's no longer cool to look cool. Nerds are *in* and they're all over the place. Pocket protectors, tape on the glasses, high-pockets pants, and gabardine shirts buttoned all the way up until it chokes: That's the Youth Class Look for the Nineties. And their teachers will think they're smart — because they look dumb. Make any sense? It's no longer a fashion statement; it's a fashion *question*.

Adult Ed. Class: Why is it that you can always pick out the Home Economics teacher at the fall back-to-school PTA meeting? Is it because her hemlines are uneven, or might it be that her pinafore is made out of recycled milk cartons? Be careful of those clever hats made from beer cans strung together with red and white yarn, too. You could look like you flunked the class and have to wear this stuff until you take it again and get it right.

No longer can anyone tell about your amount of class because of what you wear and what you paid for it. If it was frightfully expensive to begin with and you got it cheap, what was wrong with it? If it was cheap to start with and you paid *anything* for it, how smart is that? But, if it was good design once — and still is — and it doesn't look new, then let's talk price.

Most of us who are married can too easily recall our partner discarding our favorite "whatever." Sure, it may have looked terrible from behind, but *we* couldn't see it from that angle. It felt good, smelled good, had its own place in the closet or drawer, and we just loved it. In fact, isn't that my old tan leather sport coat on the guy across the street? Wonder what he'll take for it?

HDC twitted in *The Ann Arbor News*

They just don't get it

What if the columns on the new AATA depot and the overhang on the College of Business were the wave of the future? What would be worth preserving in 2092? Will the new McDonald's sign be an icon of the Nineties? Just maybe.

A *News* reporter complains that "hardly anyone knows who they are," but does little to introduce the members of Ypsilanti's Historic District Commission (12 January, 1992). He then dredges out ancient misconceptions of the concept of historic preservation as if planned control of the built environment was a Communist Plot. Doesn't he know about the Soviet Union? Has he driven down the commercial strips which lead into every town in America?

Chong W. Pyen's sub-headline at least stated that, "Ypsilanti commission's philosophy often hailed by preservationists yet scorned by some economic boosters." Since most of the Italianate Victorian edifices in Depot Town are in such good — and authentic — shape, can we assume that our thriving businesses represent the 'preservationists,' while the old depot and the deteriorating building across the street from it are maintained by 'economic boosters?'

Hardly.

There are folks around who don't remember what Depot Town looked like twenty years ago. They can't believe that most of the store fronts were panelled over and all looked closed — whether they were occupied or not. They just can't believe there were giant 'targets' nailed over the windows of much of the Thompson Block, or that a storm shed stuck out onto the sidewalk from the front door to the Central Bar at the railroad tracks. They also find it hard to believe that the Freighthouse was boarded up and surrounded by mud holes, abandoned cars and fallen-down garages. Today's 'pedestrian walkway' was full of trash, and an occasional burned-out auto showed up there, usually with skunks living underneath them. Basement window grates faced the fronts of the shops and only the sumac saplings kept walkers from falling into them.

Those were the 'good old days' before the historic preservation ethic. It was The American Way and people could do anything they wanted with their property — no matter how ugly it was or how it affected their neighbors or the rest of the neighborhood. Ironically, none of those businesses survived this period of decaying creativity. And not one of those owners is present today.

Signs for the few businesses remaining competed with each other with all the garishness of a Michigan Lotto color scheme. (Do Lotto and liquor stores in slums paint their walls in electric yellow with bright blue background because they fear an electric sign would only be shot out by the locals?)

The flashing "TV REPAIR" plastic sign which used to hang over what is now Hon's Flowers might very well be lurking in a neighbor's basement. Find it and award it to the next person who says, "I ought to be able to do anything I want with this store front."

Chances are, you can carry it out to his car for him. It's the one parked in front of his shop keeping the customers out. [Kind of like an editorial] - Tom Dodd

The Strategic Planning Model

- presented by Chamber of Commerce chair, Jeff Stabnau at DTA's retreat last month

Vision: A commitment to create a reality that currently does not exist, which then serves as the most fundamental context upon which the organization bases its existence and that guides the statement of the organization's mission.

Mission: One or two sentence statements describing the long term or fundamental context out of which our organization operates, why we as an organization exist.

Strategic goals: Generalized ends or aims an organization is attempting to achieve or attain, but cannot ever be actually reached.

Strategic objective: Statement of the specific targets an organization must achieve to succeed in its mission or goal.

Action plan: An organization's stated/documented method of proceeding to accomplish its stated goals and objectives, including the strategy to be used, critical success factors, and the resources required. This also includes:

- **Critical Success Factors:** The few actions or events which will affect the accomplishment of an organization's goals and objectives.
- **Key Milestones:** Specific and measurable activities whose accomplishment will produce achievement of the overall plan.

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Depot Town Association, Inc., 16 January 1992

The monthly meeting was held in the back room of Miller's Ice Cream Parlor & Emporium.

DTA: Firmly rooted in the past - with a clear view forward!

November minutes were O.K.

$3463.97 in the treasury with expenses and income still out on Santa's Parade and Street Dance. VP Blackmer will reconnect with the Parade committee. No electric bills since September. Treasurer will call Detroit Edison. "We must reinforce the $50 limit on Association expenditures. "

City Recreation Director Amy McMillan reports:

- New signs up on Frog Island and Riverside Park, hiring new landscape architect, total renovation of Recreation Park, and Prospect Park work is coming next year.
- Freighthouse Family Concert Series begins with The Song Sisters Sunday, January 26. Other fourth Sunday concerts will include Stone Soup, Dale Petty, Mommas and the Puppets, and others. Admission is $2.50 for adults, $1 for kids.
- Spring plans with Ypsi Area Street Rods needs new contacts. VP Blackmer will contact them to coordinate opening activities in the block.

EMU Greek Week talks continue for events in the district. President French will report on meetings with City and Campus.

Nothing new on the **fundraiser** (cow chip) proposal.

Winter Jazz Series has been moved back a month to February and March. New contract proposals are still coming. Barbara Lohr seeks volunteers via 483-4256.

Caboose cupola needs rebuilding, but no bids have been solicited yet. Contractors are interested.

Rag Report: Sales are up for Rag ad sponsors. Invoices will go out this month. Dave Blackmer will contact previous sponsors. Judy Monaghan will solicit new sponsors. 1992 sponsorships continue at only $10 per month, 10% off if year-long ad is paid. Costs continue to be around $320 a month. Many new/old ads appear this month. "It's the advertising world's best bargain," says the editor.

1992 District Projects list was suggested by neighbors on the block. (See items on this page.) French and Blackmer will affix costs and contact City Councilmembers for their support in late February.

Goals approved for new strategies (see item this issue). Prioritizing will come soon.

Car break-ins on the block are escalating. Residents are urged to make immediate reports to the police.

After fifteen years' service as a DTA officer, Secretary Tom Dodd has resigned. Sandee French will replace him in that office. Dodd will continue to be on The Rag.

Bettie Dodd will take over as **Membership Chair** and will contact Bonni Rosen-Fine for her records.

A small business seminar will be held March 25 from 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm at Society Bank with emphasis on investment, marketing, accounting, legal problems, etc. Attendance is by reservation, only, at $15 per person. Interested local businesses should conact the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce or Small Business Council chair, Scott Sobbry, at City Body. Flyers for the seminar will be distributed up the street this month.

City Council candidates wishing to make presenations to DTA should contact President French to get on the agenda.

Judy Monaghan will continue to pick up and collate the **Shoppers' Surveys** on a monthly basis. Additional implementation of the results will be discussed at the February meeting.

DTA Goals from the 11 January 1992 retreat:

(Prioritizing these items will take place at DTA's February 20 meeting.)

Fundraiser: Proceeds to DTA; find specific low cost high return events; hire a profes sional promoter; more government funding.

Business Manager: No cost to DTA; % of revenues generated or use a City employee; full time job; write a job description.

MCRR depot and Thompson Block condition: Clarifty options available.

Facades: Educate realtors, city building deparment, Chamber of Commerce; attract viable businesses; tronger leases; explore government funding; develop a loan package.

Freighthouse: Increase events & utilization
Define our three events; develop information packet to ease use by others; physically improve structure; for a committee of business manager/ city / customer

Parking: City and owners enforcement of regulatiions; carify options available; establish current and future needs

February 1992

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Depot Town Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 20th
The Old Caboose

Depot Town Antique Engine Club 27th
7:30 pm, Thursday
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

Depot Town projects (strategies?) for 1992

... suggested by our neighbors. Prioritizing will come with commitment and ownership of the individual project. Check your favorite (or add some) and stick them in the Caboose mail slot, *The Rag* box at 25 1/2 or give them to Bill French this week.

- ❑ Drinking fountain
- ❑ Antique lighting for the Market Plaza
- ❑ Landscaping by the new tower
- ❑ Iron Fence around the triangle across from Hon's Flower Shop
- ❑ Business manager
- ❑ New sidewalk benches
- ❑ New sidewalk flower boxes
- ❑ Architectural lighting for buildings
- ❑ Kiosk for advertising and posters
- ❑ Part-time gardener
- ❑ Caboose repair

✂ Clip & return

1991-1992 DTA officers

President	A. William French	483-1870
Vice president	Dave Blackmer	485-7546
Secretary	Sandee French	483-1870
Treasurer	Bettie Dodd	482-6371

DTA Sitting Committees

Membership	Bettie Dodd	482-6371
Events	Carolyn McKeever	483-4256
Rag sales	Dave Blackmer	485-7546
New sponsors	Judy Monaghan	485-4851
Freighthouse	Margaret Harner	482-6373
Heritage Festival	Steve Gross	482-1780

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
A. William French, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Some *depressing* ideas for a new business venture

'Used Everythings' has been a popular theme in the block this last decade. Whether it's used books, used cars, used clothing or used furniture, Depot Town has become the Attic of the Midwest with its recherché theme. And the recycling effort has really come to roost in the area as the Ypsilanti Recycling Project's ever-expanding home base has proven.

Now maybe it's time for used food.

This totally new concept is only new when it's put on the open market. We've been doing it at home for years. This is the perfect time to open a restaurant which deals only with *leftovers*.

As you enter the restaurant's dining room — which looks more like a residential kitchen — chrome dinette sets are surrounded by refrigerators which line the walls. Customers move from refrigerator to refrigerator, looking over the covered dishes and wrapped exotica on display. A waitperson is on hand to answer questions like, "What's this supposed to be?" and "Do I like this stuff?" From time to time that waitperson will holler, "Don't stand there all day with the door open; you'll let out all the cold!"

Diners will be allowed to return to the 'fridge as often as they wish and the bill will be totaled according to how many empty dishes they stack in the sink when they prepare to leave.

Names for this possibly-nationwide chain are still in the planning stages, but "Mom's" and "EATS" have been ruled out due to the low-class image that has been associated with previous eateries with such monikers. At this point in time, "Aunt So-and-so's" or "Granny So-and-so's" seem beyond the purview of most legal problems.

Oh, and don't tell the Health Department. We've gotten along so long with this method at home, next thing you know they'll be checking out your own home, as well.

And let's have lots of atmosphere!

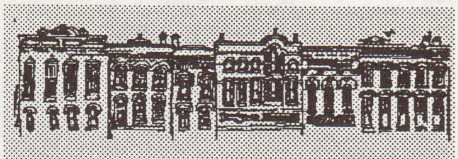
Chi chi new eateries in Ann Arbor have been getting themier and themier. Even the local fast food hamburger stands now have themes. Whether it's Merrie Olde England, Arabian Nights or Fifties Diners, most of today's new restaurants seem to have nearly emptied the warehouses of kitchy memorabilia to harken to another day or place.

According to the food reviewers of the dailies, the more complex the decor, the worse the food. And with that decline in gastronomy goes the antipathy of the staff. As complaints about tastelessness in dining mount, so do the defensive hackles of the establishment's personnel. Headwaiters are more than aloof; they are intentionally rude. Waiters are known to hip-check their patrons on exiting, knocking them off balance and into the soup and salad at the next table. And the chef often yells insults through the swinging doors of the kitchen: "Tell them to go away! Get those people out of my dining room!"

The next phase of this development is the restaurant with *all atmosphere* — and no food. Patrons will wait outside in a blinding snowstorm to get a table with a good view of the unique wallpaper, cruise the dining room to view the softly lighted art prints, softly pat the upholstery and sniff the floral arrangements. These indoor sit-down theme parks will allow customers a seat for a short time, then usher them — as if to a salad bar — into the alley! "This way to the egress!"

Will that be VISA, MasterCharge or Diner's Club? Thank you. Get out.

Sorry. No food. Just atmosphere.



Rental properties available

in Depot Town

A variety of first floor commerical and upper floor residential rentals will soon be available.

Contact

the DepotTown Clearing House at 482-6371 for the most comprehensive selection of local opportunities.

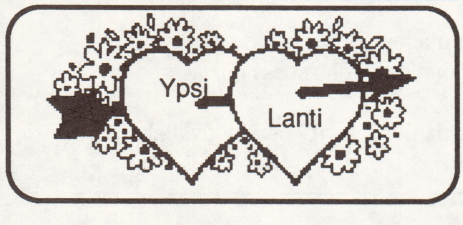
This month's Shoppers' Survey winners:

Sylvia Dowty • Tad L. Ulrich

Each won dinner for two at either **Aubree's Saloon** or **The Sidetrack.**

Thanks to the many who have filled out those little yellow surveys the past few months, the Depot Town Association has been able to adequately target its regular clientele with astounding accuracy.

The Survey continues and all are encouraged to give some feedback to their favorite urban neighborhood.



Announcing the return of the Depot Town

WINTER BLUES & Jazz! Series

back in the Freighthouse

Saturday, March 21, 1992

Saturday, April 25, 1992

Series tickets will soon be on sale through TicketMaster, WEMU, and many Depot Town businesses at $12.50 advance sales or $13.50 at the door if available. Proceeds from Depot Town's jazz events have helped pay for district-wide advertising, the street banners, erecting and lighting the giant "Welcome" sign, and many other projects for the good of the block.

Volunteers are needed, as always, for ticket taking, bartending, security, set-up and clean-up. Call 483-4256 to get your name on the list.

Dateline: Depot Town

• **Last month's memoir** of the block from the 1920's brought forth several observations: "Cady's Saloon wasn't in the Sidetrack location," says Teddy Liskow (who is a Cady!), "but in the former Artrain Building at 52 East Cross."

Jim MacDonald wonders if Power Furniture - mentioned in that same piece - was in his antique store's location, but several spaces were not remembered in the article. Anybody know for sure?

• **January's big snowfall** didn't stay long on the sidewalks in Depot Town. The walks in front of the empty restaurant and two other places just got tramped over by the many pedestrians, however. Some wondered if any of them might be lawyers. New neighbors are reminded of the City Ordinance which requires keeping sidewalks safe — and the neighborhood tradition which demands it.

• **Chamber of Commerce's Small Business Seminar** on March 25 at Society Bank sounds like it was tailor-made for Depot Town's style and demeanor. The only folks who aren't expected to make reservations through the Chamber (482-4920) are those who just can't use any more expertise in their endeavor. Scott Sobbry is chair of the division this year and he runs one of the most professional operations in town.

• **That noisy Saturday morning group** at the table in the Freighthouse Coffeeshop has been labeled a self-help group for compulsive talkers. It's called "On-and-on-Anon."

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A Depot Town SAMPLER

They're lining up to see *faux* trains

Lionel's "World's Largest Mobile Model Railroad" was seen at the Taylor Community Center last month and some Depot Towners stood in line -- along with thousands of other folks -- for more than an hour and a half to see a camper-trailer-size exhibition of model trains. Four windows in the side of the trailer were jacked up to give the enthusiastic viewers a few moments of nostalgia as they watched every kid's Christmas dream scoot down shiny tracks and into mold-green papier maché tunnels.

Perhaps folks who live in real railroad towns are surprised when they see full-grown adults playing with model trains, but we shouldn't be. Miniatures are, by common usage, designed for those who have outgrown toys and are now ready to 'remember' other toys and other times; maybe even toys they never had. Model railroad clubs all over the country are buying up old movie theaters and installing miles and miles of tiny track on which their model trains keep authentic time tables and are open to the public a few days each week.

Most of the folks who come to see the toys are kids who can't wait until they're grown up enough to have a Big Train Set of their own. Some have suggested that's the kind of display we need down here. At least there would be a train to watch -- in between the real ones.

Locals and would-be locals are encouraged to stop in at a DepotTown Association meeting to continue this kind of creative dreaming. That's how things happen down in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town. Join the fun!

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